



# MONTHLY JUNE 2005 UPDATE

## ◆ ‘Capstone Project’ creates roadmap to user-friendly website

The Maryland Department of Disabilities has established the framework for creating a user-friendly, state-of-the-art website as a result of participating with the **Johns Hopkins University Capstone Project** and the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office on Disability (HHS-OD)**.

**Hopkin’s Graduate Division of Business and Management** teamed up with MDOD and HHS-OD on a three-month project in which graduate students set out to solve a business issue specific to the two agencies--in this case, how to provide information about services for people with disabilities in a user-friendly, comprehensive way.

Organized by Johns Hopkins University, the Capstone Project allows graduate students to complete their degrees by gaining real-world experience assessing and meeting business needs in agencies from the private, non-profit and government arenas. The organizations submit proposals to the university and agree to serve as sponsors throughout the semester-long project. Once a proposal is accepted, students work with staff from the sponsor agencies to produce a solution to the need identified in the proposal.

MDOD and HHS-OD sought to provide information about community resources to constituents nationwide and charged the Capstone Project participants with devising a way to allow people with disabilities, caregivers and service providers to access information and resources over the web more efficiently. Ideally, a user will be able to connect to the same pertinent information whether they search for it through the MDOD or HHS-OD websites reducing the need to navigate through the entire maze of state agency websites.

The students developed a model for both a knowledge framework to manage constituent service requests and for sharing information between federal and state agencies. MDOD will use the recommendations in the 124-page report as a roadmap for developing its website. The recommendations will also help MDOD create a more effective system for sharing information among state agencies via the web so that constituents have a streamlined and efficient method of accessing the services they need to achieve their goals and remain independent.



◆ Empowering People ◆

## Governor Ehrlich Named ‘Governor of the Year’ by National Multiple Sclerosis Society

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) Board of Directors in Washington, D.C. has awarded Governor **Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.** the 2004 ‘Governor of the Year Award.’

**Tom Liberatore** of the Maryland Chapter of NMSS said Governor Ehrlich was selected because he has consistently demonstrated great interest in improving services for individuals with disabilities and illnesses like MS.

“We thank him for his service and applaud his commitment to individuals living with multiple sclerosis,” Liberatore said.

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## ◆ Ehrlich named 'Governor of the Year'

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In accepting the award, **Governor Ehrlich** commented: "I believe anyone living with a disability, or an illness like MS, can live an independent, productive and full life in his or her community. I am truly humbled to receive this award, and I congratulate the National Multiple Sclerosis Society for their tremendous work for a great cause."

According to the NMSS, **Governor Ehrlich** received the award because he has:

- ◆ Publicly made disability issues a primary platform of his Administration;
- ◆ Established a first-in-the-nation, cabinet-level department addressing the needs of Maryland citizens with disabilities and chronic illnesses;
- ◆ Proposed a \$371 million increase in state funding for the Maryland Medicaid program;
- ◆ Proposed funding increases to several Medicaid community-based waiver programs to support individuals with multiple sclerosis;
- ◆ Supported legislation and funded the Medicaid buy-in program allowing more people with disabilities and chronic conditions who return to work to obtain needed medical coverage.

Founded in 1946, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society supports MS research and provides multiple services, professional education programs and advocacy efforts for people with MS.



## ◆ "Roadeo" competition tests drivers' skills

Paratransit drivers face numerous challenges on the job daily, dealing with the rigors of metropolitan traffic while transporting and assisting passengers with a variety of disabilities and medical conditions. Every spring, paratransit drivers have the opportunity to show off their vehicle operating skills at the "Roadeo Driving Competition," conducted by Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) Mobility, and at the statewide "Paratransit Roadeo," sponsored by the Transportation Association of Maryland (TAM).

During this year's Mobility Roadeo and picnic April 9, drivers from MTA and the two paratransit contractors, Yellow/Connex and MV Transportation, enjoyed a day of friendly competition in maneuvering their lift-equipped buses through an obstacle course designed to test their proficiency in a number of driving environments. They competed as well in pre-trip vehicle inspection and in wheelchair securement. **Thomas Curtis, Transportation Advisor** for the Maryland Department of Disabilities, served as one of the judges,



Gregory Coleman, Gordon Biggers, and Spencer Webb, all MTA operators, were ranked first, second, and third, respectively, in the Mobility Roadeo competition. The trio were highly ranked as well in the statewide TAM Roadeo competition April 16.

Events such as the Roadeo competition are geared toward improving service for MTA Mobility users. In recent months service has improved significantly, with on time performance rates surpassing 90 percent.

## ◆ Verizon Foundation funds Voice for Freedom Project

The Verizon Foundation has awarded a \$20,000 grant to the Voice for Freedom project, a joint effort between the Freedom Center and the Maryland Technology Assistance Program (MD TAP) in the Maryland Department of Disabilities. Voice for Freedom will provide communication evaluations, devices and training to Marylanders with speech disorders who are seeking to return to the community from nursing homes.

Maryland operates several "Medicaid Waiver" programs that fund services in the community for people who leave institutions, but program rules do not permit funding for communication services and assistive technology until residents are within two weeks of moving to the community. Without effective communication, people with speech disorders are unable to express their preferences and advocate for themselves as they plan to move from nursing homes to their own homes, which often delays the process.

Voice for Freedom will provide aids – ranging from low-tech communication books to computerized speech synthesizers – to people in nursing homes well in advance of their departures. The project will literally provide a voice for institutionalized Marylanders who want to live freely.

For more information, please contact MD TAP at (800) 832-4827 (voice), (866) 881-7488 (TTY) or [mdtap@mdtap.org](mailto:mdtap@mdtap.org) (e-mail).